



# MAY HEALTH TIP



May 19th has been designated as a national “Hepatitis Testing Day” in the United States. This is an opportunity to remind health care providers and the public about who should be tested for chronic viral hepatitis. Millions of Americans have chronic viral hepatitis; most of them do not know they are infected. About 80,000 new infections occur each year.

Hepatitis is a liver disease that makes your liver swell and keeps it from working correctly. Several viruses cause hepatitis. The most common types are the hepatitis A, B, and C viruses.

Hepatitis A is spread through food or water contaminated by feces from a person who has the virus. You can get hepatitis A by eating food prepared by someone with the virus. You can also get it by drinking water in parts of the world with poor sanitary conditions. Hepatitis A vaccination is recommended for all children starting at age 1, travelers to certain countries, and others at risk.

Hepatitis B is spread through contact with an infected person's blood, semen, or other body fluid. You can get hepatitis B by having sex with an infected person without a condom, sharing drug needles, or sharing a toothbrush or razor with an infected person. A woman with hepatitis B can give the virus to her baby at birth. Hepatitis B vaccination is recommended for all infants, older children and adolescents who were not vaccinated previously, and adults at risk for Hepatitis B infection, such as those who:

- Have sexual contact with an infected person
- Have multiple sex partners
- Have a sexually transmitted disease
- Are men who have sexual encounters with other men
- Inject drugs or share needles, syringes, or other injection equipment
- Live with a person who has Hepatitis B
- Are on hemodialysis
- Are exposed to blood on the job
- Are infants born to infected mothers

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Hepatitis C is spread through contact with an infected person's blood. You can get hepatitis C by sharing drug needles or getting pricked with a needle that has infected blood on it. There is no vaccine for Hepatitis C.

Testing for Hepatitis C is recommended for people who:

- Currently inject drugs
- Injected drugs in the past, even if it was just once or occurred many years ago
- Have HIV infection
- Have abnormal liver tests or liver disease
- Received donated blood or organs before 1992
- Have been exposed to blood on the job
- Are on hemodialysis

Hepatitis B and C cause nearly 1 million deaths each year worldwide. Chronic viral hepatitis is a silent killer. Without testing for infection, many people are not aware that they are infected until symptoms of advanced liver disease appear. Advanced liver cancer has a five-year survival rate of less than five percent. Early detection is critical. If you have questions about hepatitis infection or vaccination, talk with your doctor. More information is also available from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [www.cdc.gov/hepatitis](http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis).

#### References:

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Hepatitis B General Information, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), June 2010, <http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/HBV/PDFs/HepBGeneralFactSheet.pdf>

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Hepatitis Information for the Public, CDC, April 1, 2008, <http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/PublicInfo.htm#whatIsHep>

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